

4 SKILLS WOMEN CAN LEARN TO BE HEARD IN THE MEETING ROOM

Adapted from an article by **Dr. Robert Schwarz**
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Many women complain about the difficulties they have in being heard by men in meetings. This article will apply principles that are based on the ideas of Dr. John Gray, author of ***Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus***.

There are significant differences in the way men and women think, feel and problem solve. When we learn to understand these differences in a positive and constructive light, we can learn new ways to increase the effectiveness of our communication that will increase our productivity and success.

The work world is still essentially a Martian world. Here are four specific skills that will assist a woman in being heard during meetings as well being more successful in having her ideas accepted and utilized.

1

The Art of Interrupting

This is hard for Venusians, because Venusians are interested in sharing and listening. Interrupting is rude and offensive behavior on Venus. The custom on Venus is to listen with the understanding that after someone is done talking it will be your turn. The expectation on Venus is that people will actually ask you questions to draw you out. On Mars it is very different. Everybody interrupts. It is just the way things are done. No one takes offense. It is a culture of may the best idea win.

Venusians need to understand that Martian etiquette requires that you state your opinion vigorously. Martians never expect to draw other Martians out with questions. To think that someone would need this would be an insult to that person.

For your initial foray into the conversation—you must just dive in without an invitation. Forget about waiting for a long pause in the discussion where you can gracefully enter. The most straightforward move is to use a phrase like: "Here is my opinion (and then break into it immediately). You can even skip the "here is my opinion" and go straight to "It is important that we do xyz." Or, "the problem that we are having in the beta plant is ABC". When you speak, use a steady pace of speech without a raise of inflection at the end (which makes it seem like you are asking a question or are doubting yourself).

2

The Art of Repeating from a Different Angle

Remember, this "discussion" is a contest of ideas. It is not a comment on everyone's feelings about you. Martians are very comfortable not liking or valuing a person's idea while liking or valuing the person. Besides, if your idea has any merit a Martian expects you to fight for it.

So what do you do if you are ignored (or even discounted)? You should not become angry or defensive. You should not complain that you are not being listened to. You should not say that you are not being understood. All of these moves will generate a lot of negativity. Even if the Martians do listen, they will feel criticized and resentful. You will be inadvertently increasing the negatively charged awareness of your gender differences.

Instead, you need to feel comfortable repeating yourself. Dr Gray suggests that the best strategy is to say, " Here is another angle on the problem...." followed by a restatement of your point. Another excellent variation is saying, " Lets look at it another way.... or "here is another important point (That has not been considered....)"

The goal is to use the opening clause that states that there is another reason to continue to fight for your point of view immediately followed by your point of view. Do not say, "There is another angle on this problem." Followed by a pause, expecting that someone is going to ask you to expound on that point.

3

The Art of Describing "My" Analysis

So far your point has not been accepted. Actually, you are doing well. You are making lots of headway, even if your point is not accepted. It is time for skill #3.

Martians tend to do individual tasks in teams. Martians' sense of self-esteem comes from doing. They think, "I am valuable based on what I do." That is how they tend to think about others in the work world.

So if you want your ideas to be valued, you need to own your own work. Even if your ideas are not accepted this time, you have laid the groundwork for next time.

Martians love to analyze. They respect facts and figures. Take what you know and spend some time to organize it so that you can argue that facts 1,2 and 3 lead to "A" that leads to the potential negative outcome "B" and you have solution "C" with 3 reasons why it will lead to positive outcome "D".

Have a positive solution if you are going to bring up a problem. One CEO stated that he never wanted anyone to come to him with a problem unless they either had several possible solutions or unless the person could explain how they worked on the problem and failed to come up with a solution.

When a Martian has made a point with which a Venusian disagrees, she may be concerned about getting onto a personal conflict if she says that Sam's idea is incorrect. She may be afraid that Sam will be particularly offended if a woman bests him. She may even be correct about this concern. While this may not be fair, it is the way it is. So here is a good strategy. Mary should say something like, "The issue that Sam is raising is important. I have done a detailed analysis of the factors involved. The analysis reveals.... (followed by her points)." You cannot easily get offended by numbers. She lets the analysis speak for itself.

4

The Art of the Assured Attitude

An assured attitude is not the same as an assertive attitude. Assertiveness is a Martian trait. Assertiveness communicates that I will successfully act or do. Assuredness communicates the trust that someone else will successfully act. In a recent conversation with a very successful woman, she epitomized this assured attitude in the following statement. She said, "It never occurred to me that a man would not listen to me."

Assuredness is the secret of Venusian power. The application of the assured attitude in being heard in the boardroom or meeting room is the trust that sooner or later the men in the room will hear you, even be happy to hear you. It is the assured attitude that a woman feels inwardly that lets her assertively state her opinion externally. It is the lack of hostility coupled with the trust that men will accept her ideas once the ideas have passed muster that subtly works on the psyche of the Martians. They see a woman who is confident about her ideas continuing to engage in the process without hostility or defensiveness. This is truly an impressive feat to a Martian. Remember a Martian has had many interactions with women before he dealt with you. Many of these interactions were difficult at best for him. An assured woman is a breath of fresh air. Even a die-hard sexist will not fail to be swayed.

Keep these four arts in mind. They do require practice. However, just keeping them in the back of your mind will begin to make the entire process more manageable and even more enjoyable. As you work on them pay attention to the small or even large shifts that begin to happen. The more you notice the positive changes, no matter how small, the more you will feel reinforced in your journey in being more effective.